

Whither FMV?

Philips is saying nowt but the launch of CD-I seems to have gone well in the States with rumours of up to 20,000 players sold (as opposed to entering the dealer channels). And another report has retailers selling up to ten titles per machine – three times as many as anticipated.

The launch of the consumer CD-I player into Europe is expected mid-year but again Philips are saying nothing about the date, probably because they don't know. We believe they will be forced to launch *sans* full motion video (FMV), despite the categoric assurances made by Gaston Bastiaens at the Wiesbaden show. There are two reasons why FMV may be missing from the launch machines:

- the MPEG standard has only just been buttoned down and it is highly unlikely that compression/decompression chips will be ready in quantity in time for the launch. Indeed Rockley Miller in the latest issue of *Videodisc Monitor* is saying that chips are unlikely to appear before 1993.
- no titles will be available at launch to take advantage of FMV because the compression chips needed to create the applications are not in wide circulation (although a few developers have early versions).

Would you be happy shelling out £600 for a CD-I player with an early version MPEG 1 chip hard-wired in, knowing that MPEG 2 is on its way? It would be equivalent to getting release 1.0 of a new operating system. Philips would be roasted alive by early adopters who suddenly found that their new purchase was unable to run the latest applications. Given all the bullshit about a 'world standard', Bastiaen's only option is to grit his teeth and bring out a player with a slot for adding the MPEG chip – as he has done in the States.

Once again Gaston Bastiaens will have to eat humble pie and admit that he should have followed our advice. *Inside IT* became extremely unpopular in Dorking and Eindhoven for daring to suggest that Philips should not have delayed launch of CD-I to await the coming of FMV. We dared to suggest

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that FMV would not be available. . . in 1990, in 1991, in 1992. Now it seems that the wait was in vain anyway. The success of the American launch indicates that Joe Public is prepared to buy *sans* full motion video, on the understanding that they can upgrade at a later date. Nevertheless, with or without FMV, the UK launch of CD-I will definitely happen this year, in April or September. It will be one of the major events in the calendar.

- Actually CD-I has *already* been launched in the UK – by the back door. The golf package available from Philips Interactive Media Systems gives a professional CD-I player and five titles for £695 including VAT. This could prove to be a shrewd move by David Anderson. As Robert McCoig of SPIN points out, 28% of managing directors play golf.

- David Anderson has an interesting experiment going on in the crèche at Meadowhall Shopping Centre in Sheffield. They have dropped some CD-I boxes in with the 2–5-year-olds and are going to creep back in a few weeks time and see what has happened. First results look promising.

Photo CD

Kodak have announced an expansion of PhotoCD's capabilities to include sound and graphics, not just pretty pictures. The new player, being developed by both Philips and Kodak, will be cheaper than the CD-I box. Philips (who make the boxes) may

find themselves competing with themselves!

Futuremedia booms

Futuremedia begins 1992 with a record 46 multimedia titles in production (perhaps half of the UK's total production). 35 of the discs are interactive video, the remainder are CD-I titles. 'The Quality Challenge' the first CD-I training title is being produced in association with Spin UK. It is the first in a series covering all aspects of quality and further titles will be available during 1992.

Nintendo jumps on the CD-I bandwagon

No-one who has been within a million miles of kids during the Christmas break can be unaware of the Nintendo phenomenon. They are everywhere – the players I mean. We must therefore sit up and take notice when Nintendo announce that they are developing a CD-ROM accessory for its Super Nintendo Entertainment System for launch in January 1993. This will be introduced in the US, Canada and Japan and their initial production will be 300,000 units a month! Minoru Arakawa, president of Nintendo of America, said:

At a suggested retail price of \$200, the new games accessory will launch the next generation of video games'.

What you may ask has this to do with CD-I? Well, the legions of CD-based games which will be developed for the new player over the next 12 months will use CD-ROM XA format licensed from Philips. Nintendo is also working with Philips to develop the XA Bridge format which will allow the games to also play on CD-I hardware. Nintendo is also in discussion with Sony about making the discs compatible with the Sony Play Station CD-ROM system.

The new player will be the size of a textbook and have a system cartridge containing RAM, ROM and a screen picture processor unit allowing full-motion full-screen display in real time. The XA functionality will permit interleaving of sound, video and data.

The announcement is significant. Remember Barker's First Law: Educational revolutions start in the High Street.

CDTV

We had until now assumed that CDTV, by being first, would capture the sales (on the basis that in the country of the blind the one-eyed man is king). We subscribed to the view that dealers would be reluctant to concede scarce shelf space to CD-I once CDTV had gained a foothold.

Our opinion has changed. CDTV has not gained that foothold, despite the lavish advertising campaign. It could be that CDTV has merely prepared the public to the imminent arrival of CD-I.

Naturally Commodore are still making optimistic noises and the truth is hard to find; but we would be surprised if world-wide sales exceeded 30,000 units, including 6000 in the UK. And many of those sales are to the dealer channels.

I could yet be wrong, but Nolan Bushnell is reining back on Gail Wellington's unbridled enthusiasm – awaiting some sign of a return on their fabulous investment. It's a good job that Amiga sales have continued to soar.

All the hopes of CDTV software developers must now rest with the A690 drive, first glimpsed at the BETT show on 24 January. This plugs directly into the port on the left-hand side of the Amiga A500. It runs all the CDTV discs and at perhaps £200 could be an absolute winner for Commodore. It is the ultimate games accessory and opens up the home education market to all those millions of brain-zapped Amigoids.

My message to anyone in the CDTV arena is to go down-market and start reading the Amiga magazines because middle-class early adopters are going to buy CD-I.

Why, you may ask, has it taken Commodore so long to bring the box to the market? The answer is now plain – they feared it would kill sales of CDTV. They were wrong. CDTV (as a black box in the living room) will die because no-one produced a Killer App which would force the family to set aside their TV addictions

(a fate that could still consume CD-I). The A690 will succeed because a CD-ROM drive is the accessory that every self-respecting computer will want for Christmas. And it delivers sound and pictures on the computer screen, not on the family telly.

Two niggling questions remain. Why does the A690 only runs on the A500? Is it true that the new drive runs under AmigaDOS and cannot access ISO 9660 DOS discs?

CD-ROM

Hell hath no fury like a Stainton spurned. . .

A recent edition of *CD-ROM Directions* (a newsletter from Hitachi New Media, edited by Nick Hampshire) mentioned the availability of *Dictionary of the Living World* 'from Ransom Electronic Media' and it gave a telephone number which turned out to be Kim-Tec. Odd, I thought. Rob Ransom partners Philip Nash in Media Design Interactive (MDI) which published *Dictionary of the Living World*.

Always on the lookout for a bit of skullduggery I rang Rob. It turns out to be a classic cock-up by Kim-Tec. Apparently, Kim Stainton, its eponymous marketing director, doesn't get on with Philip Nash, managing director of MDI. She thinks that because she helped them in the early days she was entitled to an exclusive distributorship. Philip Nash doesn't see it that way – he is selling by the bucketload to the States and sales through KimTec have been pitifully small. So that's why Kim Stainton is using Rob Ransom's old trading name to hype their wares.

Dictionary of the Living World is a CD-ROM containing 3000 text entries, 500 colour illustrations, 500 monochromes, 80 animations, 40 video clips, and 100 animal sounds. They also publish *Grooves*, a clip music CD-ROM and *Lifesaver*, a complete paramedics first aid course on CD-ROM.

MDI are also working on *Creepy Crawlies*, 80 video clips from Oxford Scientific (see issue 59) of all the things that kids love to hate. It was unveiled on CD-ROM at the launch of QuickTime at the BETT Show. They have also been approached by a 'major educational authority' ie Hampshire who want to work with them to produce products for the Archimedes platform. First is *Dictionary of the Living World* on CD-ROM. They have just appointed a 'shit-hot' Archimedes programmer and were praying that it would be ready in time for BETT. It was.

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Valley of Kings

A little bird called Bert, not a million miles from Eindhoven, had the gall to take me to task about my piece on Philips CD-ROM manufacture (page 13, last issue). He said that in trying to put my (CD) record straight I confused the issue. Their American CD-ROM factory (Kings Mountain) was still for sale [since sold] but the deal with DMI went through! This apparent contradiction can be explained. It seems that DMI bought the US CD-ROM business (including the sales department) from PDO. But they didn't buy the manufacturing side which is still churning out CD-ROMs for DMI. I hope that is now clear.

- PDO sold the US manufactory to Mitsubishi for \$15m.

Sony Data Dustman

I am told that the big press launch of the Sony Data Discman was the non-event of the year. 120 journalists had been invited, 20 turned up – most of them interested in the cellular phone which was launched on the same day. With no titles to speak of and a funny 3 inch format there seems little chance of emulating Sony's Japanese success here in the UK.

this document was generously contributed by

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